

## NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE BAND, 'A' DIVISION, AREA No. 11, SOUTHEND



*By Courtesy of Public Relations Officer, "A" Divn., H.Q.*

"What we want is a band!" said Fire Force Commander P. G. Garon to Deputy Fire Force Commander W. T. Soper, who was then Southend's Divisional Officer, as they marched at the head of a National Fire Service contingent returning from a local church parade way back in November, 1941.

An immediate call to all firemen in "A" Division, Southend, who could play an instrument and who would like to join an official N.F.S. combination, brought a ready response.

Column Officer Whistler, divisional clerk, kindly agreed to act as band secretary, and Section Leader Hodges, former deputy bandmaster of Shoebury Town Band, who also plays the cornet, was put in charge of the first 16 applicants, eight of whom had band experience. Others who applied had never played in a band before.

Before rehearsals could commence, sufficient instruments had to be sought from somewhere. A few of the band had their own. Twelve more and drums were kindly loaned by the committee of the Shoebury Town Band and others by the Rayleigh Town Band. Their total value came to £579 15s. Intensive rehearsals began on November 23rd, 1941.

The Essex Fire Force Silver Band's first public engagement was a real test-piece. The band marched at the head of a procession in connection with Hornchurch (Essex) warship week. There was six inches of snow on the ground, which was so slippery that one bass player fell over, instrument and all. In the evening it grew so cold that their instruments froze, and after struggling through

"Colonel Bogey," the next march, "Death or Glory," proved peculiarly appropriate, for they just could not play another note—a case of death without the glory.

Since then the band has grown to 30 instruments and has performed over 100 programmes, including at four local cinemas, nine performances at Southend Bandstand during the summer months in connection with "Holiday at Home" weeks and in aid of Southend War Charities effort, and a number of appearances during local National Savings Weeks all over Essex. The band has helped entertain troops in canteens, on isolated camp sites, and has played for war workers at factory lunch-time concerts in various parts of the area.

It was a proud day for Section Leader Hodges when in June, 1943, at the Romford (Essex) Musical Festival, the Band won "The Essex Championship Cup," "The Romford Stallholders Challenge Cup," "The Founders Cup" and "The A. W. Miles Cup." The high musical standard of performance which resulted in these awards was entirely due to this hard working bandmaster's efficient direction. Since the band's formation, in addition to all his other duties, Section Leader Hodges had actually found time to teach seven or eight of the members to play.

Now Bandmaster Hodges is busy forming and rehearsing a male voice choir. Eight of the present bandsmen, plus four N.F.S. newcomers who will be made honorary members of the combination, will provide an additional musical attraction. Their repertory will include sacred, folk and traditional songs of varied character.